Emily Joseph

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Deb Moore

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ChaCha – Define “Family”

Human nature dictates that certain information should be disclosed only to those in whom it can be trusted. Naturally. It’s not to say that one should divulge one’s most intimate details to a stranger, but the self-disclosure of one’s more private stories holds the power to bring people closer together.

It is arguable that all forms of communication, that is, verbal and nonverbal – both voluntary and involuntary – reveal some aspect of a person’s nature. Aspects of one’s character can be deciphered from the notation of a flick of the hair, glances with the eyes, clenching of the fist, or one’s posture or stance. This in itself is a form of self-disclosure.

Though the inferences of these actions may shed light onto one’s personality, it does not allow for the “why” behind them – the element of confidence is lacking here. It is my argument that the willful disclosure of intimate details promotes the creation of bonds between two or more individuals. To accept that this, in fact, is so, one must first understand the ultimate concept of self-disclosure.

“Willful self-disclosure” is the deliberate divulgence of the exact feelings and actions performed or thought by the discloser to another person (Greene, Derlega, and Mathews 411). Granting them access to private things and secrets generates the formation of an unseen bond built on the trust to not disclose the shared information elsewhere.

For instance, when two people begin talking, seeing each other and eventually dating, generally, the levels of self-disclosure between the couple are heightened. Studies indicate that this is, in part, because people tend to share more with individuals they like, and to people whom, in return, self-disclose with them (Greene, Derlega, and Mathews 413).

Not only will the couple share with each other stories from their past, they will provide the other with up-to-date information. Personal self-disclosure updates a person on the other’s where a bouts, and what each person is thinking and feeling at a given moment in time. Relational self-disclosure informs the couple of the state of their relationship (i.e. is the couple getting along and is the current status of the relationship successful?) (Greene, Derlega, and Mathews 412).

Among friends, disclosure is necessary to the stability of one’s mental health (Greene, Derlega, and Mathews 417). The desire to be listened to and recognized is one of the five basic human needs, concerning the need for love and affection. An intention of telling stories of one’s day is to fulfill that need. As a friendship blossoms, and said friends become closer, sharing initiate or personal stories becomes less difficult. That is, the closer two people are to each other, the likelihood of sharing those stories increases (Draper, Pittard, Sterling 8).

Take, for example, a secret. The purpose of a secret is to remain unknown. This rule, however, is exempt amongst friends, who must swear to never repeat it.

Such is the psychology of a secret: An event takes place in which no one must find out about; somehow, however, someone comes to know of it. The person burdened with the knowledge of the event longs for another to take on some of its weight, and after much deliberation, tells it to a friend. The satisfaction of disclosing the secret comes, not with the sharing of its weight, but in the cruelty of not allowing the friend to repeat what they have just learned (Angus 4). This form of self-disclosure displays trust between the two friends.

With disclosure comes discretion. What topics to include or avoid in conversation may be detrimental to the formation of relationships between romantic couples and to friends or peers. Too much transparency of one’s past or thoughts may be associated with the future disinterest of an intended romantic partner, or the perceptions and expectations of potential friends and peers (Greene, Derlega, and Mathews 413).

The classic “first-date” jitters are not unwarranted. A friend expressed to me the oddity of his date’s random disclosure of a highly personal matter. The two had only met once before, and the subject caused his slight intrigue with the girl to vanish, because of the peculiarity and unwanted nature of her divulgence.

In a class where students were expected to share pieces of their writing, one student dove too recklessly into his privacies for his liking. Though the class was all too eager to hear more about these personal topics, he realized he was not ready or willing to unveil such delicate information to near strangers – the course had only just begun a few short weeks prior.

Individuals might decide against the disclosure of information with those they are close to. These may be topics that are considered “taboo”. In deciding whether or not to expose an issue known only to the discloser, he or she must decide if the benefits outweigh the costs of telling the other. This includes, as a result, the consequences both parties will undertake.

One must consider closeness of the relationship between the sender and receiver of the message, the setting, and possible expected reactions of the party being informed (Greene, Derlega, and Mathews 413). The decision to or to not disclose also rides on the discloser’s perceptions of the following questions: Is the subject too personal or too difficult to divulge? Is the matter of interest too undesirable for the partner to know or too burdensome to worry about? Is the information simply too private (Greene, Derlega, and Mathews 415)?

In light of these qualifiers, one may elect to falsely self-disclose to protect oneself (Greene, Derlega, and Mathews 416). The incorporation of a lie in the formation of a story preys on what the person being lied to wants to hear.

In a situation where a wife has been unfaithful to her husband, and is too ashamed to admit her discrepancy, she may prefer to alter or withhold certain details. These will include and cut the where’s and when’s of her departure, along with her delays and arrival.

Instead of lying, she may decide to avert her husband’s attention elsewhere, using relational self-disclosure by saying, “I’m so glad to be with you right now! I love you, darling.” This indicates to the husband that the state of their relationship remains intact (Greene, Derlega, and Mathews 412).

Though the wife’s actions are not condoned, her efforts should not go unnoticed. For the sake of maintaining closeness with her husband, she did not share her secret affair because, while protecting herself, it was undesirable for her partner to know. The psychology of a secret, then, cannot apply to all whom one is close to, but to the people it does not involve.

The nature of self-disclosure parallels the existence of the sun – a daily factor in life’s ongoing game. It is fundamental to the development and maintenance of a relationship – be it romantic or otherwise.

Self-disclosure is just that – personal and of the self. In an attempt to create a bond with the person in whom the information is divulged, it is the hope that, through disclosure, affection and love will be attained.

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